Implementing English-Medium Instruction in the Context of World Englishes

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Abstract

Given the global market, improving English proficiency is one topic commonly addressed in newspaper articles about Japanese education. Issues that have been discussed include how to improve student competencies with respect to the current global market; what kind of classes should be provided to improve student proficiency; and how to prepare classes to achieve this aim. One approach taken by some universities is to implement English-medium instruction（EMI）. In fact, EMI has increasingly been adopted in non-English speaking countries（Colemann, 2006）. Meanwhile, we must bear in mind that with intensifying globalization, English is increasingly being used in settings far removed from English native-speaker countries. This leads to the concept of World Englishes（WEs）, 'English as Lingua Franca'（Jenkins, 2000, Seidlhofer, 2001）, or "variety of English used in diverse sociolinguistic contexts"（Bhatt, 527）. We should provide learners an opportunity to raise their awareness of their command of English and its potentiality. This paper aims to examine EMI practice in order to implement it more effectively by reviewing several case studies and consider several practical approaches to improve learner competencies in Japan in the context of WEs.

Given the global market, improving English proficiency is one topic commonly addressed in newspaper articles about Japanese education. Issues that have been discussed include how to improve student competencies with respect to the current global market; what kind of classes should be provided to improve student proficiency; and how to prepare classes to achieve this aim. One approach taken by some universities is to implement English-medium instruction（EMI）. In fact, EMI has increasingly been adopted in

non-English speaking countries (Colemann, 2006). Meanwhile, we must bear in mind that with intensifying globalization, English is increasingly being used in settings far removed from English native-speaker countries. Situations in which people from different cultures communicate in English in the absence of native speakers are not uncommon. Lee identifies three groups of English speakers: inner circle, outer circle, and expanding circle (191). The inner circle signifies countries where English is the primary language; the outer circle refers to countries (e.g. India, Nigeria, and Singapore) where English is institutionalized, but with non-native variations; and finally the expanding circle includes countries where English is purely a foreign language. According to Gnutzman, 80% of communication in which English is spoken as a foreign or second language involves no native speakers. It is quite likely that English serves as the language of communication between individuals from the expanding circle or individuals from both the outer and expanding circles. This leads to the concept of World Englishes (WEs), 'English as Lingua Franca' (Jenkins, 2000, Seidlhofer, 2001), or "variety of English used in diverse sociolinguistic contexts" (Bhatt, 527). We should provide learners an opportunity to raise their awareness of their command of English and its potentiality. This paper aims to examine EMI practice in order to implement it more effectively by reviewing several case studies and consider several practical approaches to improve learner competencies in Japan in the context of WEs.

Not only has EMI been widely adopted by South Asian countries formerly colonized by English-speaking countries (e.g. India, Singapore, Malaysia and Hong Kong), other Asian countries, including Japan, have started to introduce EMI in higher education. The basic assumption of EMI is that increased exposure to English-language environments will improve acquisition. This, in addition to learning about a particular subject; however, turns out that the aim is not easy to realize. Byun and others examined the effectiveness of EMI in Korean higher education. They discuss several problems and interrelated "side effects" of EMI, which are presented and further explored below.

According to their study, EMI tends to create distance between instructors

and students. Students reported a lower degree of interaction and intimacy. This is understandable particularly if the students' listening proficiency is not good enough to understand the lesson content, leaving them with no hooks to communicate with the instructor. If students are unable to understand what the instructor is saying, they cannot ask questions. In addition, we can easily assume that the students say nothing in class due to their insufficient speaking ability. They simply listen to the instructor without interacting. Byun and others state that this could increase student anxiety, particularly among freshmen and sophomores who have recently graduated from high school and are unaccustomed to EMI. An unfamiliar learning environment and instruction in a language they do not understand clearly leave them frustrated and result in an increased level of anxiety.

Meanwhile, insufficient proficiency in English on the part of a non-native English speaking instructor has also been suggested as a negative factor. The situation is exacerbated when instructors are incapable of expressing themselves fully in English (Byun and others, 95). An instructor could be less clear or less accurate when teaching the subject and may tend to cover less material. Moreover, an instructor might be unable to provide prompt examples or react to questions about the subject. Another issue discussed is the increased workloads for both students and instructors. In addition to the new knowledge acquired, both teachers and students alike, must also prepare and review the content in the English language. Despite the issues mentioned above, Byun's study points out the students' increased awareness of the need for English proficiency in order to understand EMI courses. Bearing the "side effects" referred to above in mind, several suggestions to improve EMI are discussed below.

One suggestion in responding to the needs of students is to utilize their native language (L1) to a certain degree. In Byun's study, 25.6% of students requested instructors to use their L1 (i.e. Korean). The use of L1 is only possible if the instructor and students share a common L1, which I would like to consider here. Using the target language (L2) alone and eliminating L1 is referred to as a Monolingual approach, which is rooted in the skills we acquire in our mother tongue (L1): maximizing exposure to L2 is

key to language learning. Successful learning should involve separating and distinguishing between L1 and L2. Consequently, this theory suggests that students should be exposed to L2 only while learning in the class（Voicu, 213）. This may work for a range of early-age learners, but constraints should be applied to this approach in higher education. He examined the systematic use of L1 for the benefit of L2 development by means of an experiment involving 14 Chinese students, focusing on the similarities and differences between Chinese and English and on a conceptual understanding in L1 for L2 learning. The study reveals that L1, Chinese in this case, was employed as "a mediating tool for possible positive cross-lingual transfer" which "provide[s] scaffolding for learners"（13）. According to He, the students' existing scheme can be activated by having them compare the two languages, which should raise their awareness of the similarities and differences between the languages. As students are supposed to possess conceptual, strategic, and linguistic knowledge of their L1, we should use it effectively（13）. Moreover, by comparing vocabulary and grammar, the lesson can be enriched or clearly understood. If we compare proverbs, idioms, songs, jokes, etc., we are able to learn culture as well. Similar positive results are drawn from other studies. Tang（2002）, who conducted a study in China involving 20 teachers and 100 students, and Miles（2004）, who focused on three low-level first-year university classes in Japan, conclude that the limited and judicious use of L1 did not distract students from learning the L2, but rather facilitated it.

In addition to the linguistic benefits, I also want to focus on the psychological effects. A Monolingual approach can increase student anxiety, which has been mentioned as a negative aspect of EMI. A learning environment in which students do not understand what they are told or cannot express themselves is hopeless. I have been given an opportunity to teach freshmen "pragmatics", a new subject for the students, in English at a Japanese university. I tried to conduct the first few lessons only in English. As could have been expected, there was almost no interaction between me and the students（nor among the students themselves）due to a lack of tools to communicate. This proved and can prove to be a highly challenging situation.

Taking note of the students' response and mood of the class, I switched to Japanese. This created a more relaxed and amiable atmosphere, which fueled increased interaction. Auerbach（1993）, Jones（2010）, and Alvarez（2014）indicate that the selective use of L1 reduces the anxiety level of students and creates effective learning environments. Voicu（2012）also recommends a balanced and flexible view of the use of L1 in a classroom through reviewing studies.

Consequently, instructors should carefully consider when and how often to use L1 and not overuse it. Instructors should be in charge of the use of L1 as appropriate to the learners and the lesson content. The level of the learners and the subject matter should be taken into consideration as well. Naturally, L1 can be used more frequently at lower levels. Voicu suggests using L1 for beginners whose L1 should play a leading role in learning L2（214）. Beginners or low English proficiency students may more likely lose their confidence in learning. They can more commonly feel they do not understand because they are not smart enough and may lose confidence in learning and be less motivated to learn. In order to raise the level of confidence and satisfaction of students in the learning process, we must foster a sense of accomplishment, which stimulates motivation. This process should have ties to the subject matter as well. Most of the studies or research have been conducted in English as a foreign language（EFL）classes. However, with respect to EMI, the subjects serve as general foundation courses. If the subject and content is new to the students, they will have a harder time following the lecture. The students could be highly motivated, but this motivation cannot be fully drawn upon in a class that poses great challenges for them. Instructors should develop classes that respond to the needs of students properly and in a satisfactory manner and not classes that frustrate them. In order to achieve this, instructors should consider using L1 to explain new concepts, vocabulary or unclear issues when requested to do so. Some supplementary materials, either in L1 or L2, could also be introduced as a means of reducing student anxiety.

However, we should also be careful not to overuse L1. While instructors can take a targeted approach in the use of L1, in my personal experiences of

teaching, students tend to use L1 with classmates during class. As regards EMI, the students' use of L1 should not represent a major issue since it is usually conducted in a lecture style. This could, however, pose an issue in EFL classes. While this paper has so far discussed EMI, I would like to now consider applications in current EFL classes now. When the students and instructor share a common L1, some students are reluctant to speak English or even express negative feelings about speaking English with other students. While an instructor can compel students to speak English with each other, it may be difficult to enforce due to their passive attitude. As an example, we can conceive of a situation in which students in Japan are compelled to speak English. Freiermuth and Huang examined the motivation of 20 Japanese students by having them chat with 19 non-Japanese EFL students using synchronous chat software. They focused on four factors affecting task-based motivation: "the willingness to communicate, task attractiveness, task innovativeness, and the need to communicate in the target language" (61). The study found out that the activities had a positive impact on all four factors. Students showed a high degree of motivation with respect to each factor. This is understandable in that they actually had to communicate in English in a real situation with people from a different culture with a different language. Their degree of satisfaction could increase once they recognized that their level of English was sufficient enough to communicate. One of the positive influences was that in order to chat smoothly, they practiced voluntarily on their own to feel comfortable and be ready for a real conversation. Such vocalized self-learning is very important for speaking, but it is hard for learners to do in practice unless they are put in a situation where they actually realize its necessity. In addition to student motivation, this study discusses several other ideas. First, by chatting with people from different countries, students are able to learn about their own culture as well as their chat partners. In order to respond to questions about their own country, they have to learn about them and be able to express them in English. At the same time, they learn about their chat partners' culture by asking questions. Second, when this practice is implemented in Japan, it may be convenient and practical to choose Asian countries due to the reduced time lag. As far as time lag

is concerned, Australia is a good candidate. This is in addition to the fact that participants are native speakers. However, the benefits are not lost when selecting Asian countries where English is not a mother tongue, as it offers a good occasion to experience WEs. This is briefly discussed below.

The concept of WEs supports the idea of "varieties of Englishes used in diverse sociolinguistic contexts", which "rejects the dichotomy of US (native speakers) vs THEM (non-native speakers) (Bhatt, 527). Having an opportunity to learn English from a native-speaker teacher surely offers advantages, but studying the language in variation seems to be equally important given the current degree of globalization. Students may have to communicate in English with people from different cultures in many situations in the near future. In general, it can be assumed that Japanese students will speak English with a Japanese accent, while Taiwanese students will have a Taiwanese accent. The important thing here is that students may become aware that their English actually works in communicating with others. Regarding the ability to speak English, many students tend to say that they want to improve pronunciation, because their English does not sound native and because they lack confidence. Making the effort to improve pronunciation is important, but speaking clearly and with confidence is crucial for communication. By talking to students from a different culture, they can become aware of varieties of English and consequently gain confidence. As Lee suggests, providing opportunities to learners from different L1 backgrounds to interact with each other using their English is needed (193). Utilizing chat software should be considered an option to provide students ways to practice their English with other learners of varying proficiency levels or divergent L1 backgrounds.

Going back to EMI, there is another notion related to WEs. One of the claims or concerns in EMI addresses the English used by instructors in class. EMI is as challenging for non-native English speaking teachers as it is for students. In order to avoid situations where students do not understand the lesson content due not only to the use of English in general, but also to the English used by instructors, teachers should prepare or practice what to say in class. Although the increased workload of EMI was identified as a nega-

tive aspect, it is necessary to spend more time to prepare. Meanwhile, no amount of preparation can completely remove the issue of having an accent when speaking English. In this case, instructors should not be so concerned about their accent, provided they speak the language understandably and with more confidence. Eventually, students should become accustomed to the English used by instructors. Students and instructors should be aware that the English used in class represents one of the varieties of the English language.

This paper examined issues raised with respect to implementing EMI in higher education by reviewing the research of Byun and other studies. This was followed by a discussion of the use of L1 as an option to improve current practice. Bearing the age of the learners in mind, a monolingual approach may not be as effective in higher education as it could be for early-age learners. A certain degree of use of L1 should create a better learning environment where learners are motivated and face less frustration. On the other hand, we should be careful not to overuse L1, which is more of an issue for EFL classes. A study using chat software was introduced to explore alternative means to providing language practice to students as well. In addition to EMI, placing students in a situation where they actually have to use English to communicate with people from a different culture should occur more frequently in current higher education practice. By talking to each other, students can become aware of and acquire WEs through personal experience. Learners and instructors alike should become aware of its potentiality, experiencing varieties in English and further making use of it in actual practice.

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